



Part 5: Dying to Approval for God's Embrace John 15:18-25

Through the life of the Son, we now stand in the approval of the Father, empowered by the Spirit.

I. "You will be persecuted as I have been persecuted..."

Wherever your mind goes with the word "persecution," approval is the thing that unifies the vast range of experiences – from life-threatening situations based on your faith; to feeling uncomfortable stating your beliefs in friendships here; to simply living out the radical commands of the gospel at risk of being teased.

Where in your life have you felt that ebb and flow of approval? How do you respond to those situations? Do you hold back out of fear? Do you say something else, to be safe? Do you do what the world expects of you, so as to not upset it or go against the norm?

As we hold those in mind, let's look at the life of Christ and how he dealt with that ebb and flow of approval, and together see what grounded him despite it all.

II. Jesus' Life Marked by the Ebb and Flow of Human Approval

Both today, Palm Sunday, and Jesus' life are marked by the constant ebb and flow of human approval. On Palm Sunday, he was praised and honored, but people in the same 24 hours were plotting to kill him. If you read through the gospel of John in one sitting, you see the extremes he goes through, as well.

- John 4: Loved by the Samaritan, disapproved of by his disciples and friends
- John 5: Loved by the man he healed, hated by the Pharisees
- John 6: A crowd seeks to make him their king, then deserts him because his teachings are hard
- John 7: People in awe of his teaching

- John 8: People want to stone him for his teaching

You get the idea!

But Jesus was not dependent on the approval of his disciples, his closest friends, so he was able to freely love those who were hated and rejected.

He was not dependent on the approval of those religious leaders; he did not fear what they could do, and so he was able to freely offer life and healing to those who wanted it.

He was not dependent on the approval of the crowds, so he was able to freely teach both in loving and hard-to-hear ways.

What was it that kept him grounded in the midst of this constant ebb and flow? He knew that he stood in the steadying approval of the Father.

III. Jesus Marked by the Approval of the Father

Jesus starts his ministry around 30 years old. Until that point he had been a carpenter. So, before he had done anything “note-worthy” enough to put into the gospels (except the one story of when he was 12), he receives deep words of love and affirmation from his Father. His ministry is inaugurated by these words: “You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased.” (Luke 3:22b)

And because of what Christ did, you and I can stand in this approval as well. Through Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection, he made a way for us to have access to the Father. We are no longer dependent on our own standing before God as fallen, sinful, wounded people before an almighty, holy God, but we claim with Paul that “[we] have been crucified with Christ and [we] no longer live, but Christ lives in [us]. The life [we] now live in the body, [we] live by faith in the Son of God, who loved [us] and gave himself for [us]” (Galatians 2:20)

But is that enough? Is it enough to simply have that fact in our minds? Is that statement powerful enough for us choose what is good and right over and over again without worrying about what others will think?

IV. Jesus Sends the Holy Spirit to Empower His Brothers and Sisters

Because God could predict we would be forgetful of his truths – the truth of his sovereignty, power, approval – we are promised help. In John 14:26, Jesus promises that “The Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you.”

When we receive the Holy Spirit, we don’t have to wrestle with our forgetfulness alone. The Holy Spirit works to convict and guide us, to teach and remind us of what God has declared over us.

- This same Holy Spirit may nudge us into interactions we would rather avoid, for fear of others' perception. He may nudge you to make a deep friendship with that person you and all your other friends have been avoiding at school or work, knowing you'll get backlash from your friends.
- This same Spirit may lead you to a smaller home or smaller budget, sacrificing being a part of the social norm, in order to pour money into those in need.
- You may be led to speak up against someone who is abusing their power against someone more vulnerable, at risk of being subjected to repercussions.
- You may be led to humbly apologize to or forgive someone, even though others may think you're weak or being a pushover.

And that same Holy Spirit can bring to mind the truth that will outlast the ebb and flow of human approval: It is through the life of the Son, that we now stand approved by the Father.

This coming week, would you invite the Holy Spirit to bring to your attention when you are doing something out of fear of losing someone's approval? The more we rest in the Father's approval, the freer we will be to live lives that are devoted to Loving God and loving our neighbors, instead of simply loving human approval.

Friends, through the life of the Son, we now stand approved by Father and empowered by the Spirit.